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## **Violence by royal command: a judicial ‘moment’ (1574-1575)**

On 26 June 1574, Gabriel de Lorges, comte de Montgomery and Huguenot commander, was executed in Paris. Propaganda condoning his fate quickly appeared. Printed discourses claimed that not only was Montgomery a ‘true monster ... born to subvert and ruin this kingdom’ and leader of conspirators and rebels, but that he had shown ‘sacrilegious disloyalty’. Over a period of thirteen to fourteen years, he had taken up arms against the king no less than five times (suggesting that the crown had been more than patient with him), and that in the end he had been ‘salarié’, that is had received his just desserts as a non-repentant rebel.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, other sources report that on the scaffold he refused to confess or repent, declaring that ‘he would die for his religion, that he had not committed treason, nor anything else against his prince’, and prayed ‘as those of his religion’ did.<sup>2</sup> Montgomery’s execution thus divided contemporary opinion. His gratuitous cruelty and repeated sedition were cited as justification for his sentence, whereas his piety and restraint contradicted this same verdict. This event might seem disconnected from the better known St Bartholomew’s Day massacres which preceded it, but, when seen in its wider context, it forms part of an apparent shift in the French monarchy’s attitude which was embodied in its enforcement of judicial violence. In turn, this change in approach can best be seen as a royal response both to the radicalization of the Huguenot movement and to the fears of subsequent plots, involving both Protestants and Catholics, in the wake of the massacres.

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<sup>1</sup> *La Prinse du comte de Montgomery* (1574); *Discours de la mort et execution de Gabriel Comte de Montgomery* ... (Poitiers, 1574), both reprinted in *Archives curieuses de l’histoire de France depuis Louis XI jusqu’à Louis XVIII*, eds L. Cimber & F. Danjou (1836), viii [hereafter *Archives curieuses*], 225-53.

<sup>2</sup> P. de L’Estoile, *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, eds M. Lazard & G. Schrenck (Geneva, 1992), i. 64-6; J.-A. de Thou, *Histoire universelle de Jacques-Auguste de Thou, depuis 1543 jusqu’en 1607* (1734), vii, 86-7.

The brutality of St Bartholomew's Day and the responsibility for it has long dominated historiographical debate.<sup>3</sup> The years immediately following, including the transition between the reigns of Charles IX and Henri III, have attracted far less attention.<sup>4</sup> The massacres of 1572 resolved little and, yet, cast a long shadow. The strain between the crown and the French nobility was particularly evident and relations remained extremely tense. Both the events which took place in the aftermath of the violence, and the royal response to the continuing tensions, are revealing. Discontented and fearful individuals among the *grands* responded to the uncertainty about royal policy by reconfiguring existing alliances. The resulting association between the Huguenot leadership and the moderate Catholics, or 'catholiques associés', increased the monarchy's sense of vulnerability. Foreign intervention in the confessional conflict, in support of these groups, was another major concern. The crown sought a judicial solution in order to deal with those posing a particular threat to its authority. As a consequence, in the space of a few short months in 1574, the monarchy gave orders for several high-profile noble trials and executions as well as aristocratic imprisonments. Further action was taken the following year. By targeting those involved in conspiracies and military action against it, the crown sought to reinforce its legitimacy and strengthen its authority through the imposition of extraordinary royal justice. From a close examination of these events, both the weaknesses and strengths of such a strategy are evident. Significantly, this brutal reaction by the crown to the dangerous position in which it found itself following the massacres was distinctive from its approach both before and after 1574-75. It is this judicial 'moment' that will be explored here.

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<sup>3</sup> For the best and most comprehensive overview, A. Jouanna, *The St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The Mysteries of a Crime of State*, trans. J. Bergin (Manchester, 2013); on the violence, *Ritual and Violence: Natalie Davis and Early Modern France*, eds G. Murdock, P. Roberts & A. Spicer (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> The fullest account is Francis de Crue, *Le Parti des politiques au lendemain de la Saint-Barthélemy. La Molle et Coconat* (1892). Among the few modern works which discuss these events in any detail: M. P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Politique Struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1986), 38-43; Jouanna, *The St Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 213-15; A. Jouanna, *Le Devoir de révolte. La noblesse française et la gestation de l'État moderne, 1559-1661* (1989), 156-8.

## I

From around 1560, European rulers ceased to burn dissenters as heretics, thereby creating martyrs, and began instead to hang them as rebels and traitors, shifting the focus from religious dissent to the political crime of treason. This wider emphasis on sedition rather than confessional difference as the issue when determining punishment was evident in France.<sup>5</sup> As the monarchy embraced a policy of religious toleration and coexistence in the 1560s, negotiating peace with the Reform movement and releasing dissenters, judicial prosecution of Huguenots declined sharply. However, the picture looks rather different by the mid-1570s, when there was more sustained labelling of the Huguenots as rebels and disturbers of the peace just as they had been in the pre-war period. Now they were connected not only with alleged plots against the crown, but the defection of leading Catholics, notably the king's youngest brother, François, duc d'Alençon, as well as members of the house of Montmorency and others labelled as malcontents. As a result, the crown resorted to desperate measures in order to curb the seditious tendencies of an increasingly disgruntled nobility, but, significantly, by pursuing their agents and followers rather than the *grands* themselves.

There was nothing new in the emergence of noble dissent. Both contemporaries and later historians remark on the similarities between the monarchy's position in the mid-1570s and its confrontation with the League of the Public Weal (or *Bien Public*) in the 1460s.<sup>6</sup> In the sixteenth century, Huguenot rhetoric several times mobilized rights of resistance to tyranny and claims to defend the 'bien public', notably in the 1560 conspiracy of Amboise and the 1567 surprise of Meaux.<sup>7</sup> The royal response was inhibited, however, by the need to

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<sup>5</sup> D. Nicholls, 'The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), 49-73.

<sup>6</sup> *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion*, eds A. Jouanna, J. Boucher, D. Biloghi, G. Le Thiec (1998), 222, 231; *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, ed. E. Albèri (Florence, 1860), iv, 329-30.

<sup>7</sup> Jouanna, *Devoir de révolte*, 9, 145-6, 153-4, 158-60, 393-4.

appease the Huguenots in order to maintain public order. The events of 1572 arose from an exceptional set of circumstances in which the crown had both the motive and the means to eliminate the Huguenot leadership with the gathering for Henri de Navarre's wedding to the king's sister, Marguerite. The tense atmosphere in which each side believed that the other was actively plotting against it continued into the following period. The massacres, therefore, can be seen as a botched attempt to resolve the issues arising from confessional division and, much more so, the crown's need to reassert its authority. The residue of unfinished business which the violence left behind is clear. While Admiral Gaspard de Coligny and other leading figures in the Huguenot movement had been eliminated, others had escaped or, in the case of the princes of the blood Navarre and Henri, prince de Condé, were under effective house arrest having been forced to convert to Catholicism. Pressure on the crown was compounded by the regrouping of the Huguenots in the south-west and the successful defiance of La Rochelle, besieged by royal forces in 1573, as well as resistance in Normandy and elsewhere. Furthermore, rumours of other conspiracies against the crown continued to circulate, and the attempts to free Navarre and Alençon from royal control compounded these concerns. This, in turn, led to greater fears and ever-tighter vigilance over the princes. The death of Charles IX at the end of May, and the subsequent three-month regency of Catherine de Medici while the return from Poland of the new king, Henri III, was eagerly awaited, fuelled this atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty.

Two months after the massacres, the judicial process had already claimed its first victims. François de Briquemault and Arnaud de Cavaignes, Coligny's lieutenants, were hanged on 27 October 1572 for their leading part in the supposed plot against the crown.<sup>8</sup> Both had played prominent roles in the Huguenot movement and were well known to the

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<sup>8</sup> A[rchives] N[ationales], U//785, fo.117 (23 Oct.); AN, X2a, 940 (28 Oct.). C. Haton, *Mémoires*, ed. L. Bourquin (2002), ii, 461; *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane*, eds A. Desjardins & G. Canestrini (1865), iii, 853-4.

authorities.<sup>9</sup> They had been arrested a few days after the massacre after a frenzied search for them and other significant survivors.<sup>10</sup> The most prominent of these were Jean de Maligny, the *vidame* de Chartres, and the comte de Montgomery who had successfully fled to England.<sup>11</sup> An effigy of Coligny was posthumously judged, sentenced and hanged alongside Briquemault and Cavaignes, signalling the legitimacy of his assassination.<sup>12</sup> Arlette Jouanna comments that ‘these trials have too often been neglected or derided as parodies of justice’ and describes them as acts of ‘ordinary’ justice.<sup>13</sup> More than this, however, they should be seen as the first in a wave of judicial executions designed specifically to reinforce royal justice in the wake of the massacres and the threat of rebellion. Notably, it was decided to pursue the leading Huguenot commanders, Montgomery in Normandy and the sieur de Montbrun in Dauphiné, and to take them to trial. First, though, the monarchy had to deal with a threat much closer to home, as evidence of plots was reported from within the French court itself. Most significantly of all, these circumstances provided the crown with the chance to set an example and to assert royal authority through a commission of ‘extraordinary’ justice. The treason trial and subsequent executions were expedited quickly underlining the urgency of the royal response.

## II

The massacres of 1572 had increased confessional tensions, while also making both the French crown and the remaining Huguenot leadership nervous about each other’s intentions.

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<sup>9</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique de Bertrand de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénélon, ambassadeur de France en Angleterre de 1568 à 1575* (1840), vii, 331-2; Jouanna, *Devoir de révolte*, 134-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 338; S. Goulart, *Mémoires de l’estat de France sous Charles Neufiesme*, i (1577), 750, 752-3.

<sup>11</sup> A. d’Aubigné, *Histoire universelle* (Maillé, 1618), ii, 19, lists the survivors.

<sup>12</sup> Archives JH[istoriques de la JP[réfecture de JP[olice], A<sup>B</sup>, Reg.4, fo.115v (27 Oct).

<sup>13</sup> Jouanna, *St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre*, 105-6.

At court, the strains and stresses encompassed personal animosities between the families of Montmorency and Guise and the increasing paranoia of François d'Alençon, and his new brother-in-law, Henri de Navarre. It is not surprising, then, that in the early months of 1574, there were two attempts by their supporters to get the princes away from the court. The first, in February, the so-called 'effroi de Saint-Germain', was quickly uncovered, but the second appeared altogether more sinister.<sup>14</sup> With Charles IX in failing health and the absence of his heir, Henri, the crown was receptive to the suggestion that there was a plot to remove them all in favour of Alençon. The duc's recent diplomatic contacts with England and the Empire now took on a more suspicious aspect. The subsequent trials of those involved in the alleged plot included Alençon's favourite, Joseph de Boniface, sieur de La Molle, and the captain of his guard, Annibal de Coconat. Furthermore, one of the principal judges, Christophe de Thou, father of Jacques-Auguste, asserted that the Montmorencies and certain Huguenots had taken advantage of Alençon.<sup>15</sup> Protestant sources insisted that the accused were interrogated on the basis of trumped up charges. It was said that an agent of the chancellor had procured the main witness, Yves de Brinon, to 'play the required role' in making the accusations, and that he was one of twenty-five spies employed by the queen mother.<sup>16</sup> The veracity of the claims that the conspirators' plan went far beyond a foiled plot to free the princes is not of concern here. The fact that the crown believed that this was possible is much more significant for shaping how it responded and its use of violence to resolve the issues which emerged.

The extraordinary commission which was established in Paris to investigate the 'damnable, wicked and malicious conspiracy' carried out by La Molle and Coconat and their

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<sup>14</sup> *Discours de l'entreprise de Saint-Germain, fin de février 1574*, reprinted in *Archives curieuses*, 107-18; *Négociations diplomatiques*, iii, 905-7 (5 Mar.).

<sup>15</sup> De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 36-9.

<sup>16</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 199; d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 120.

accomplices, in April 1574, acted under direct royal instruction.<sup>17</sup> It was led by the senior presidents of the *Parlement* (de Thou) and of the *Tournelle* (Pierre Hennequin), assisted by two lay councillors. As befit a treason trial, the judges were granted full powers, including permission to arrest anyone, regardless of status.<sup>18</sup> All other judicial cases were suspended and the proceedings, from arrest through interrogation and torture to judgement and execution, took three weeks.<sup>19</sup> The remarkable details of the trial provide intriguing insights into the anxieties on all sides and the febrile atmosphere in Paris and, in particular, at the court.<sup>20</sup> Nowhere is this clearer than in the depositions of the young princes of the blood. Navarre in particular lamented the position in which he had been put.<sup>21</sup> His testimony is striking; at just twenty years old he lacked the sense of invincibility which his succession to the throne and survival of numerous assassination attempts would later give him. While making clear his track record of loyalty to, and affection for, the royal family, he highlighted the shame that he felt at having brought his close friends and companions with him to Paris only to see them slaughtered, leaving him ‘alone, stripped of his friends and of trust’.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, he observed resentfully that the crown had no grounds for suspicion of him, whereas he had been told that the plan was to undertake ‘a second St Bartholomew’ which would spare neither him nor Alençon. Navarre also claimed to have heard that, if La Rochelle had fallen the previous year, then the Huguenots and their allies (including new Catholics like

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<sup>17</sup> B[ibliothèque] n[ationale] de F[rance], MS Dupuy 590, fo.21; ‘Documens originaux relatifs au rôle du duc d’Alençon, sous les règnes des rois Charles IX et Henri III, ses frères, et à l’histoire du tiers-parti’, *Revue rétrospective*, 5 (1836), 235-6; De Crue, *Le Parti*, 181-2.

<sup>18</sup> S.H. Cuttler, *The Laws of Treason: Treason Trials in Late Medieval France* (Cambridge, 1981). On 21 May, a further 21 named individuals were ordered to be apprehended: BnF, MS Dupuy 590, fo.23; AN, U//785, fos 121, 123-4; ‘Documens originaux’, 237.

<sup>19</sup> BnF, MS Dupuy 590, fo.21; ‘Documens originaux’, 236, judges ordered to proceed regardless of holidays; AN, X2a, 941, the *plumitifs* indicate time taken off for Easter, although ‘la court fut aux prisonniers de la conciergerie et du grand chatelet’ on 7 Apr. My thanks to Tom Hamilton for help with this reference.

<sup>20</sup> *Archives curieuses*, 127-221, are a faithful reproduction of Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 208-81. Unfortunately, the *conciergerie* register, AHPP, A<sup>B</sup>, Reg.4, is incomplete for this period.

<sup>21</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 219-25, 250-4; *Archives curieuses*, 143-51 (13 Apr.), 181-6 (18 Apr.); BnF, MS fr[ançais] 3969, fos 21-24r; d’Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 121.

<sup>22</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 221; *Archives curieuses*, 146; BnF, MS fr 3969, fo.22r.



himself) would have been killed, and if his wife had a son (thereby securing the succession) he would not live long. Furthermore, he and Alençon were outraged at the order to search their rooms and he felt ‘great shame’ at being refused entry to the king’s bedchamber in the presence of other gentlemen.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the crown promoted his enemies and the perpetrators of St Bartholomew, and he had to put up with disparaging remarks that with the ‘house of Bourbon, there is always war’. All in all, this provided Navarre with more than enough ‘just and apparent occasion’ to escape.<sup>24</sup> This was not a matter of treason, therefore, but of self-defence. Alençon asserted that he had resisted any overtures to join the rebellion or to act against his brother, Henri, but that their followers often fell out with one another.<sup>25</sup> He defended the ‘steadfast and loyal’ La Molle’s role in informing the crown about the previous plot in February, and claimed that he had warned him not to be misled this time, although the others distrusted him.<sup>26</sup> Such tensions between the conspirators cannot have aided their cause. While implicating the prince de Condé, both Alençon and Navarre reported the central role of Guillaume de Thoré, the youngest of the Montmorency brothers. La Molle would later describe him as ‘evil’ and the ‘cause of everything’.<sup>27</sup>

The interrogation and torture of La Molle and Coconat is also revealing about the relationships between the *grands* and their followers. The two protagonists took very different approaches to their situation. La Molle denied all knowledge of the plot, stating that he had ‘only done what M. le duc commanded of him’ and that Alençon had always been a ‘good brother to the king’.<sup>28</sup> Later, confronted by a statement from the duc incriminating him, he questioned its authenticity and whether it was extracted under duress, and requested that

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<sup>23</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 223-4; *Archives curieuses*, 149.

<sup>24</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 253, 225; *Archives curieuses*, 185, 151; BnF, MS fr 3969, fo.24r.

<sup>25</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 213-19; *Archives curieuses*, 136-43 (13 Apr.); BnF, MS fr 3969, fos 18-21r.

<sup>26</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 217-18; *Archives curieuses*, 141-2; 208-9 (30 Apr.); d’Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 119; de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 44, that La Molle simply revealed what could no longer be hidden.

<sup>27</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 273; *Archives curieuses*, 211 (30 Apr.).

<sup>28</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 209; *Archives curieuses*, 131 (11 Apr.); BnF, MS fr 3969, fos 24v-25; de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 50; d’Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 120.

he be allowed to see his master.<sup>29</sup> Coconat, by contrast, was permitted to go straight before Charles IX and to confess everything; traditionally, such a ploy could result in exoneration, but not on this occasion. Intentionally or not, he gave the crown what it wanted: proof that the plot went further than freeing the princes to betraying the kingdom in alliance with the English and the Germans, itself sparked by the duc's suspicions of a plot to eliminate him and Navarre.<sup>30</sup> Other testimonies would reveal that these fears involved supposed collusion with Spain. Correspondence intercepted between Philip II and Catherine allegedly sought advice on how best to dispose of a family member, as Philip reputedly did his son, Carlos.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these apparently very real (and in many ways well-grounded) fears, princes of the blood could usually count on a reprimand rather than a prosecution. Alençon, Navarre and the prince de Condé were protected by their status, especially at a time of great uncertainty about the royal succession. As far as possible, the monarchy sought to avoid bringing aristocrats to trial for treason before the *Parlement*, the ultimate seat of sovereign justice, although Condé's father, Louis, had faced prosecution in 1560.<sup>32</sup> In the charged circumstances after St Bartholomew, no-one was quite sure how the situation might have changed and everyone was nervous. The uncertainty regarding Alençon's sympathies contributed both to Catholic suspicion of his intentions and Protestant optimism about his support for their cause. The safeguarding of the agents and clients of such figures was much less certain, as seen in the fates of La Molle, and Condé's secretary, Jean Abraham. They can be seen as ciphers, their executions for treason in 1574 and 1575 symbolic both of the discontent with their protectors' actions and of the failure of that protection to save them. Once sentenced and with nothing more to lose, La Molle began to recount how he had been obliged a hundred times by the duc on his life and all he held dear to say nothing, before

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<sup>29</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 243-5, 267; *Archives curieuses*, 173-5 (15 Apr.); 204 (30 Apr.).

<sup>30</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 210-13; *Archives curieuses*, 132-6 (12 Apr.); BnF, MS fr 3969, fos 26-27r, 32v-36r.

<sup>31</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 253; *Archives curieuses*, 185; G. Parker, *Philip II* (Chicago, 2002), 92-4.

<sup>32</sup> On the role of *Parlement* and the infrequency of treason trials, Cuttler, *Laws of Treason*.

finally confessing his involvement.<sup>33</sup> Charles IX was allegedly overjoyed to hear of his execution, while the distraught Alençon took to his bed.<sup>34</sup> La Molle, Coconat and Abraham were rapidly dispatched once due judicial process had exposed their supposedly treacherous designs.<sup>35</sup> And they were not the only ones in these tense years of 1574-75.

There had been growing discontent with royal policy among the higher nobility, much of it focused on marshal François de Montmorency, whose moderation made him respected by both sides.<sup>36</sup> Suspected of sympathy with the malcontent position, François and his cousin and fellow marshal, Artus de Cossé, were imprisoned in the Bastille.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, according to Charles IX's own account, the conspiracy trial interrogations made it clear that the two marshals and their kinsman, Henri de Montmorency-Damville, were 'the principal authors' of the plot.<sup>38</sup> Directly following the conviction of la Molle and Coconat, the king requested that president de Thou and the others involved in trying the case come to see him, so that he might be 'well informed about the things which had resulted from their trial'.<sup>39</sup> He also sought guidance from the *Parlement* about the 'best way' to proceed with regard to the marshals and how those of their status had been customarily prosecuted 'heretofore'.<sup>40</sup> Although Montmorency and Cossé were never tried, they would be detained for eighteen months, despite the change of regime. Following their release, however, as an indication of renewed trust, they were sent to negotiate with Alençon and his allies, including Damville, who had managed to evade capture.

Several others among the accused had been able to flee, notably the younger Montmorency brothers, Charles de Méru and Guillaume de Thoré, as well as their nephew,

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<sup>33</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 269; *Archives curieuses*, 206 (30 Apr.); BnF, MS fr 3969, fos 29-32.

<sup>34</sup> C[alendar of ]S[tate ]P[apers ]F[oreign], 70/131, fo.3 (2 May 1574).

<sup>35</sup> BnF, MS fr 3969, fo.36v; AN, U//785, fo.118; CSPF, 70/130, fos 223, 227 (27 & 30 Apr.).

<sup>36</sup> De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 38-9, of 'rare probity ... enemy of all faction'; Haton, *Mémoires*, ii, 392, 'held to be a Huguenot but not a rebel'.

<sup>37</sup> *Archives curieuses*, 121-6.

<sup>38</sup> BnF, MS fr 3201, fo.73 (4 May); AN, U//785, fo.122 (7 May).

<sup>39</sup> BnF, MS Dupuy 801, fos 85-6 (1 May).

<sup>40</sup> BnF, MS Dupuy 590, fo.27; 'Documens originaux', 241 (7 May).

Henri de La Tour, vicomte de Turenne. They also included two of Alençon's chamberlains, the seigneur de Grandchamp and Jacques de La Nocle, at whose house most of the plotting allegedly took place.<sup>41</sup> Of those remaining to be tried, François de Tourtay, secretary to Grandchamp, was the first to be executed, nearly a week before La Molle and Coconat.<sup>42</sup> Pierre de Grandry, brother of Grandchamp, was freed through family connections; their maternal uncle was Sébastien de L'Aubespine, bishop of Limoges and royal councillor.<sup>43</sup> While the Italian astrologer, Cosme Ruggieri, was later reprieved through the intervention of his patron, Catherine de Medici, his treatment reveals wider concerns.<sup>44</sup> His role was explored during the interrogations of La Molle and Tourtay, as well as the statement by Coconat in which he emphasised that La Molle and Ruggieri were hand in glove.<sup>45</sup> Questions focused on the use of a wax figure found among La Molle's belongings. He was pushed hard on its significance by suspicious judges in his final torture session on the day of his execution, but La Molle continued to protest that it was not of the king, but of a woman he had hoped to seduce.<sup>46</sup> During the trial, Jean de La Guesle, *conseiller du roi* and *procureur-général au parlement*, acted as go-between with the commissioners on behalf of the king and queen mother. Catherine sought to deflect blame from Ruggieri onto La Molle and the need to check his lodgings for 'malevolent things'. When arrested, Ruggieri had allegedly asked if the king was vomiting and bleeding and his head hurt, and Catherine ordered La Guesle to instruct the commissioners to investigate whether enchantment had been involved in procuring the king's illness and, indeed, Alençon's infatuation with La Molle.<sup>47</sup> It was

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<sup>41</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 202; *Negociations diplomatiques*, 914-16 (14 Apr.).

<sup>42</sup> BnF, MS fr 3969, fo.36v; Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 262; *Archives curieuses*, 195-6.

<sup>43</sup> De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 54.

<sup>44</sup> *Negociations diplomatiques*, iii, 920-1 (26 Apr.), 923 (1 May), 928-9 (4 May); de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 54; d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 121, that he was a 'sorcier' and Catherine employed him as such.

<sup>45</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 259, 268, 272, 275-7; *Archives curieuses*, 192-3, 205, 210, 214-16.

<sup>46</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 271-3; *Archives curieuses*, 209-11.

<sup>47</sup> BNF, Dupuy 590, fos 24, 26 (29 & 26 Apr.); 'Documens originaux', 238-40; CSPF, 70/130, fo.223 (27 Apr.).

evident during the interrogation that the use of sorcery to violent ends was to be explored by the judges as posing a very real threat.

Fear was at the heart of the reaction of all parties to the St Bartholomew's Day massacres, whether among the surviving Huguenots, including those that had converted, or the royal authorities anxious about reprisal and foreign intervention. The 'effroi' of Saint-Germain was claimed to have been set up to justify 'another St Bartholomew's day', and Montgomery was summoned to Normandy from England to 'resist the new enterprises tending to a second massacre'.<sup>48</sup> When Turenne and Thoré came to treat on behalf of the king, Montgomery reported that the memory of St Bartholomew was too fresh for them to be deceived again.<sup>49</sup> Rumours spread of a new massacre in Paris in March and the Florentine ambassador asserted that the Huguenots had 'fear of another St Bartholomew', and that their struggle was no longer to uphold their religion but to save their lives.<sup>50</sup> Navarre also mentioned it twice in his testimonies.<sup>51</sup> Catholics, too, were prone to believe tales of conspiracy, including incriminating evidence against the plotters from supposed 'discoveries' of secret letters and active conspirators.<sup>52</sup> When Antoine de Saint-Paul claimed that his nephew, Saint-Martin-des-Pierres, had boasted that as a result of the plot there would be blood running through the streets, Saint-Martin denied it except as an everyday expression that he might have used, but it doubtless stirred up fears of reprisal for the massacres.<sup>53</sup> Such rumours were, thus, swirling around the court and in Paris even twenty months after the event, and royal fears of further rebellion continued for three years after and right up until the peace made with the Huguenots and their allies in 1576.

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<sup>48</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 197, 207; *Archives curieuses*, 110; *Relazioni*, iv, 331.

<sup>49</sup> CSPF, 70/130, fo.136 (23 Mar.).

<sup>50</sup> CSPF, 70/130, fo.169 (1 Apr.); *Négociations diplomatiques*, iii, 912 (24 & 30 Mar.).

<sup>51</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 221, 250; *Archives curieuses*, 146, 181.

<sup>52</sup> Haton, *Mémoires*, iii, 116; *Négociations diplomatiques*, iii, 914-16.

<sup>53</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 232, 235-6; *Archives curieuses*, 159, 163-4.

### III

At the same time in April 1574 as La Molle and Coconat were being interrogated in Paris, the lieutenant-governor of Normandy, Jacques de Matignon, was under royal instruction to seize the Huguenot commander, the comte de Montgomery.<sup>54</sup> The notorious jousting opponent of Henri II on the day in 1559 that the king was fatally wounded in the lists, Montgomery had since been active in the various theatres of war on the Huguenot side and, along the way, had made many enemies as well as attracted many supporters. He was a notable survivor of the St Bartholomew's Day massacres and went on to ally with England against the crown. In La Molle's initial interrogation, he was asked if Montgomery was in any way implicated in the plot, but his name was never mentioned again during the trial. Likewise Montgomery would deny any involvement, a view upheld by several commentators, although his recent contact with some of the plotters might suggest otherwise.<sup>55</sup> Montgomery was seized in May 1574, shortly after Montmorency and Cossé were detained, and subsequently transferred to the *conciergerie* in Paris to be tried.<sup>56</sup> His imprisonment coincided with the brief period of Catherine de Medici's regency between the death of Charles IX and the return of Henri III from Poland. Just a month after his arrest, he was condemned to death for treason by decapitation in the place de Grève, deprived of noble status, and all his possessions confiscated (and therefore his heirs disinherited) by the crown; exactly the same traitor's fate as that of La Molle and Coconat.

Montgomery's death is a good example of the politicization of religious execution in the post St Bartholomew's era. While Catholic reports emphasized his treacherous actions and Protestant accounts his unwavering faith, he was also said to have withstood torture and

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<sup>54</sup> *Lettres de ]C[atherine des ]M[édicis]*, eds H. de La Ferrière and B. de Puchesse (10 vols, Paris, 1880-1909), v, 4-5 (3 June).

<sup>55</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 210; *Archives curieuses*, 132; de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 86-7.

<sup>56</sup> *Négociations diplomatiques*, iii, 931 (31 May); CSPF, 70/131, fo.123 (21 June).

refused to implicate marshals Montmorency and Cossé. Other observers saw it differently, stating that the queen mother had, thus, got her long-sought revenge for her husband's death.<sup>57</sup> But it did not require a long-held personal vendetta to understand why the crown might have wanted Montgomery out of the way. His activities in supporting the rebels of La Rochelle and wreaking havoc in the province of Normandy made him a threat to the whole kingdom, as both Charles IX and Catherine de Medici wrote to Matignon, for his capture would bring 'repose to these unfortunate lands'.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, despite the crown's concerns, there was not the royal delight that we might have expected at his death. Catherine reported it only briefly towards the end of a very long letter.<sup>59</sup>

Despite, indeed because of, the extent of Montgomery's exploits over many years and much of France, the crown declared that he was to be subjected to 'fair and exemplary justice'.<sup>60</sup> We may compare this to the exchange between Coconat and his judges after he was sentenced, when he questioned whether the king would not prefer to see a good servant spared. He was told that above all the king 'wants to see justice done'.<sup>61</sup> It was customary practice to institute a swift judicial process in the case of accusations of treason, especially if it involved collaboration with foreign powers, but its application was rare during the wars. Worthy of note, too, is the propaganda war provoked by Montgomery's fate. Was it the death of a brave man or a coward? Haton reported that he surrendered 'shamefully', and claimed that Montgomery knew that Charles IX had been poisoned.<sup>62</sup> De Thou, by contrast, asserted that he had endured his torture 'courageously' and gone to his death with an 'assured expression' and 'admirable constancy', even jokingly admitting that he found magistrates

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<sup>57</sup> L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*; d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 123; de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 87, facetiously states that Montgomery was put to death for a chance accident rather than a deliberate act.

<sup>58</sup> *LCM*, iv, 288 (9 Mar.); 298-302 (May).

<sup>59</sup> *LCM*, v, 44 (30 June).

<sup>60</sup> *LCM*, iv, 308, n. 1 (29 May).

<sup>61</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 274; *Archives curieuses*, 212 (30 Apr.).

<sup>62</sup> Haton, *Mémoires*, iii, 121.

more intimidating than armies.<sup>63</sup> Catherine, for her part, excused the speed with which Montgomery was judged and dispatched, having said that she had hoped to await the arrival of Henri III, but that her hand was forced by the popular agitation that his presence caused.<sup>64</sup> Even Protestant commentators report the hatred which the inhabitants of Paris felt towards him, but also that he was viewed more with pity than with spite.<sup>65</sup>

Montgomery's downfall was, therefore, part of a more complex political context which saw the crown using judicial violence to curtail the threat and quell the ambition of a religious minority which could not be successfully defeated in the field or brought to the negotiating table. The St Bartholomew's Day massacres had not been successful in this endeavour and had, in fact, made the threat greater by exacerbating both Protestant and Catholic noble discontent with the crown and providing the Huguenots with new allies. The monarchy's inability to remove the key players led to the humiliating negotiation of the Edict of Beaulieu (or Peace of Monsieur) in 1576 and a further Catholic backlash. The subsequent rise of the League, under the leadership of the house of Guise, would dominate and distort the rest of Henri III's reign.

#### IV

Prior to the 1572 massacres (and again from 1576), each peace edict exonerated those accused of 'religious' activities and the judicial record was wiped clean, leading to the freeing of many prisoners. The practice of pardoning those involved in the religious wars during times of peace, and the safe conducts issued in these cases, had long proved problematic for the French crown in dealing with subversion. In the wake of the massacres,

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<sup>63</sup> De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 86-7; d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 131, on his 'serene countenance'.

<sup>64</sup> *LCM*, v, 44 (30 June). The only indication of his trial in the criminal records of the *parlement* is, 'Ce jour ne fut plaidé aucunement et le conte de Montgomery fut executé': AN, X2a 941 (26 June).

<sup>65</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 389; CSPF, 70/131, fo.123 (21 June); de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 59-60.



however, such individuals were not to be let off so lightly, especially if their actions could be associated with treason. Arrests for the secret carrying and distribution of correspondence are one example. In the summer of 1575, Jean Abraham, secretary of Henri, prince de Condé, was captured and executed for this offence. He was taken on his way to England ‘charged with packets and memoirs concerning the state of the king and of his realm’, and quickly transferred to Paris to face trial. As a result of interrogation and torture, he allegedly declared ‘secrets and plots of great importance’ against the crown.<sup>66</sup> He was condemned ‘by order of the king’ to be hanged and quartered in the place de Grève and his body parts displayed.<sup>67</sup> Others reported that ‘they that were at his condemnation affirm there was neither matter nor proof against him, and so he protested at his death’.<sup>68</sup>

Abraham was severely treated because of his close links to Condé. Catherine de Medici, Henri III and the cardinal of Bourbon, Condé’s uncle, wrote to the prince to inform him that Abraham’s execution was well deserved, ‘for very just and reasonable causes to which he had confessed and was proven under his seal that he had wanted to offer six thousand *écus* to have the king killed’. Meanwhile, Condé was reminded of his ‘natural’ duty to serve the king, his blood relative, and advised that he should ‘embrace what is worthy of the place from which you have issued’.<sup>69</sup> He was also severely reprimanded by the crown for nurturing and listening to treacherous individuals, which was said to cast suspicion both on the sincerity of his own obedience to the crown and his dedication to the peace. Considering that Condé had been in exile in the Empire since the revelation of the supposed conspiracy at the French court in which he was implicated, his loyalty was already more than in doubt.

Another source specifically implicates Alençon, postulating that, by the letters, ‘it was known

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<sup>66</sup> L’Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, i, 197 (13 Aug.); CSPF, 70/136, fo.174, where he is referred to as Abraham Troune taken on the ship the ‘Catherine’.

<sup>67</sup> AHPP, A<sup>B</sup>, Reg. 5, fo.10r (19 July); judgement (13 Aug.).

<sup>68</sup> CSPF, 70/135, fo.25 (13 Aug.).

<sup>69</sup> LCM, v, 131-2; *Lettres de Henri III*, ii, 216-17 (19 Aug.).

that the tragedy that was being played out in France was in his name and by his authority'.<sup>70</sup> Executed alongside Abraham was Saint-Martin, the last of the prisoners interrogated about the alleged conspiracy the year before, and safeguarded up to that point by Alençon's favour.

More sinister still was the presence of extra-judicial violence at the edges of these executions and conflicts, often involving royal favourites, which suggests that the crown had less control of the situation than it sought. Among other violent acts was the murder of Moissonière, a Norman captain, who had been captured with his son alongside Abraham. He was released only to be killed by François d'O, one of Henri III's so-called *mignons*, as he returned to his lodging.<sup>71</sup> A similar fate befell Henri's favourites, Louis de Bérenger Le Guast and Jean Janowitz de Besme, both notorious for their involvement in the 1572 massacres.<sup>72</sup> Le Guast had several aggressive confrontations with Thoré and Alençon's followers, including just prior to the 1574 trial, and was subsequently murdered in his bed.<sup>73</sup> L'Estoile describes him as 'superb and audacious, inflated by the favour of his master', but through divine retribution atoning for all the innocent blood that he had spilt. Navarre mentions him in the same breath as his fears of a second St Bartholomew.<sup>74</sup> Henri III's open hostility to his previous followers, La Molle and Coconat, is significant in understanding both their actions and the response of his entourage to them.<sup>75</sup> Le Guast had served alongside both of them at La Rochelle and, like La Molle, had been seriously injured as part of a distinguished military career. He was generally seen to control access to Henri to the extent that Marguerite de Navarre blamed him for poisoning the relations of their brother with her and Alençon.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Haton, *Mémoires*, iii, 145.

<sup>71</sup> CSPF, 70/136, fo.174 (1575); *Lettres de Henri III*, 216-17; L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, i, 198 (19 Aug.).

<sup>72</sup> L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, i, 194-5 (July); d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 19. On Le Guast, N. Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi: mignons et courtisans au temps des derniers Valois (vers 1547-vers 1589)* (Paris, 2000), 85.

<sup>73</sup> L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, i, 205-6 (31 Oct.); de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 301-2; Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, 368-71.

<sup>74</sup> L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, i, 206; Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 250; *Archives curieuses*, 181; CSPF, 70/131, fo.17.

<sup>75</sup> Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, 157-8, letters of 30 Jan. & 6 May 1574; La Nocle had also served Henri.

<sup>76</sup> Le Roux, *La Faveur du roi*, 173-5.

The papers seized on Abraham were said to reveal the extent of English engagement with such rebels as if they were at ‘open war’ with France. Intercepted letters had already indicated unlimited English support for the Huguenots, and the French crown requested that Elizabeth desist from granting aid to Montgomery and others ‘openly or clandestinely’ contrary to the bonds of amity and the treaty between them.<sup>77</sup> The flying of the English cross of St George by the fleet that went to aid La Rochelle was particularly provocative, and a year later, Charles IX asserted that Montgomery was still planning the ‘ruin of my kingdom’.<sup>78</sup> English interest in the 1574 trials was considerable and unsurprising in view of the involvement of Alençon and his followers, several of whom had been recently present at the English court on behalf of their master, and of Montgomery, a frequent visitor and consistent ally. Notably, La Molle had been actively representing the French crown in negotiations with the English when the St Bartholomew’s Day massacres took place, returning to France shortly thereafter.<sup>79</sup> Elizabeth tried to intervene in his favour via her ambassador, describing him as ‘very honest’ and that she did not believe that he had the ‘heart to make mischief’. In response, Catherine de Medici stated that his crimes could not be excused and added that La Molle had been ‘nourished closely by us’ and favoured like a ‘companion’ rather than a servant which made his offence ‘so much the greater’.<sup>80</sup>

## V

Valentine Dale, the English ambassador, reporting on Abraham’s execution, commented that, ‘They have had Montbrun to Grenoble in Dauphiny to do the like to him.’<sup>81</sup> Thus,

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<sup>77</sup> *Lettres de Henri III*, ii, 177 (21 June 1575); *Correspondance diplomatique*, 456 (1574); 382 (3 Nov.1572).

<sup>78</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 411-12 (23 Apr.1573); 466 (2 May 1574).

<sup>79</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 328, 330, 335.

<sup>80</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 460-61; CSPF, 70/130, fo.223 (27 Apr.).

<sup>81</sup> CSPF, 70/135, fo.25 (13 Aug.1575); on his earlier wounding, 70/134, fos 222, 225 (15 July).

Montgomery was not the only Huguenot commander to be summarily executed at this time. The following year, Charles du Puy, sieur de Montbrun and military leader in Dauphiné, met the same fate in much the same circumstances, but at Grenoble rather than in Paris. There are notable similarities in the two commanders' experiences and the way that they were treated. Montbrun had already fallen foul of the crown several times over many years. In 1574, he caused personal offence to Henri III, on his return to the kingdom, by blocking the passage of his entourage across a bridge in Dauphiné and pillaging its baggage, feeding the 'incredible hatred' of the king.<sup>82</sup> Despite this, it is argued that a later attempt by the crown to reconcile with him was rebuffed, as with Montgomery, an important part of justifying both their condemnations. Once again, the royal commander in the region, lieutenant general de Gordes, was instructed specifically to go after Montbrun. Once captured, Henri III urged Gordes and the *parlement de Grenoble* to bring him to justice for *lèse majesté*.<sup>83</sup> Like Matignon before him, Gordes was vilified for handing Montbrun over to his enemies, damaging his previously moderate and equitable reputation.<sup>84</sup>

In the wake of his death, contemporaries presented Montbrun as both a fanatical Calvinist convert, murderer, thief and brigand, and a military hero, valiant soldier and man of principle who was 'resolute and determined'.<sup>85</sup> Commonly known as 'the brave' or 'the valiant', Montbrun's death was viewed as violating the laws of war.<sup>86</sup> All concur that he was so seriously injured before his capture that he had to be carried to the scaffold. Gordes confirmed this, and the sieur de Hautefort reported that his wounds were so painful that he could neither walk nor ride.<sup>87</sup> Some felt that by its undue haste the crown showed excessive

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<sup>82</sup> Jouanna et al (eds), *Histoire et dictionnaire*, 864.

<sup>83</sup> *Lettres de Henri III*, ii, 192-4 (9 July).

<sup>84</sup> De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 271.

<sup>85</sup> G. Allard, *Les vies de François de Beaumont, baron des Adrets, de Charles Dupuy, seigneur de Montbrun, et de Soffrey de Calignon, chancelier de Navarre* (Grenoble, 1675); L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal*, i, 193; de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 271; cf. Haton, *Mémoires*, iii, 143, on the 'brigand' Montbrun.

<sup>86</sup> D'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 137.

<sup>87</sup> BnF, MS fr 15560, fos 24, 27 (25 & 26 July); d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ii, 137, that he was 'half-dead'.

and gratuitous cruelty as Montbrun would have died of his injuries anyway. 'It would have been good if he had been killed in combat' Hautefort wrote, rather than face justice, since this 'will alarm the Huguenots and make us no more favourable to the protestant cantons'. His principal concern was the disastrous effect that the commander's execution might have on the chances for peace in the region.<sup>88</sup> Condé and other Protestant leaders tried in vain to save Montbrun's life. Reputedly, the king granted him a pardon, but the document arrived two hours too late to save him, reminiscent of the late appeal to have La Molle and Coconat spared an ignominious public execution.

Noble honour (and its converse, dishonour or shame) was a recurring theme in royal and aristocratic rhetoric and justified the use of violence and other forms of resistance. The issue of honour, both individual and familial, loomed large in the trials of 1574-75. This included the shame of Navarre at his treatment, as well as the dishonour caused to the 'poor race' of La Molle who had sacrificed so much for the crown.<sup>89</sup> When the accused were confronted with their accusers, each sought to discredit the other's integrity and, therefore, their testimony. As well as denying all knowledge of the plot, Saint-Martin was extremely keen to clear his name with regard to the accusations of fraud made against him.<sup>90</sup> A principal concern of the condemned was that they should have an honourable death in accordance with their status: a private execution at night for La Molle and Coconat, and beheading rather than hanging for Tourtay.<sup>91</sup> None of these requests, despite the intervention of Alençon for La Molle and Condé for Montbrun, was granted. Montgomery and Montbrun's safe-conducts were also overridden and they both sought a noble death. Their swift dispatch shocked their peers and discredited those responsible for handing them over to the ruthless application of royal justice. Status was important in these instances. Royal action against the second tier of

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<sup>88</sup> BnF, MS fr 15560, fos 26-7 (26 July).

<sup>89</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 269; *Archives curieuses*, 206 (30 Apr.).

<sup>90</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 266; *Archives curieuses*, 200-1 (29 Apr.).

<sup>91</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 277; *Archives curieuses*, 217; also requesting that their debts and servants be paid off.

the nobility was calculated and the sentences were carried out quickly in full public view for maximum effect.

Another recurring theme in royal rhetoric was the admonition to potential troublemakers abroad to behave in keeping with their lineage. In April 1574, Charles IX warned Condé to ensure that his followers ‘live peacefully in their houses’ in order to ‘restore repose to this kingdom’, but that if they ‘became hardened in their wrongdoing’ he would ‘pursue them vociferously by force’.<sup>92</sup> Thoré’s obedience was expected and offered, as appropriate to his house and his honour, acting always ‘as a man of my birth ought’. He would have to behave if he was to benefit from royal goodwill, or ‘you will do wrong to the father whose issue you are’, and in view of the precarious position of other members of his family languishing in prison.<sup>93</sup> Montgomery, too, had been warned to stay in England and not to stir up further trouble by the king, ‘without undertaking anything contrary to my service ... as do my other good and loyal subjects’ which would be ‘better for your honour’.<sup>94</sup> His return to France, in defiance of this command, ultimately sealed his fate.

## VI

The prosecution of both Huguenots and Catholics for participation in plots served to vindicate the non-confessional position the crown had adopted with regard to St Bartholomew’s Day. As with its duty to uphold the edicts of pacification and to safeguard the ‘bien public’, this was a policy consciously focused on subversion and ‘malign conspiracy’ rather than religious belief.<sup>95</sup> It also promoted the primacy of royal authority and, in particular, of royal justice. Charles IX observed that the conspirators were to be tried by

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<sup>92</sup> BnF, MS fr 15559, fo.59 (20 Apr.).

<sup>93</sup> BnF, MS fr 15559, fos 109r (22 July), 165.

<sup>94</sup> CSPF, 70/126, fo.65 (9 Feb.1573).

<sup>95</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 331-2 (1572).

members of the *Parlement* ‘by whom any accused man in this realm desires to be judged rather than by any others, because of the great and singular integrity for which they are recognized’. On the conspirators, he stated,

Their fate will serve as a good example to all those who have such evil enterprises in their hearts as those they have attempted; for it can be said that, during the hearing and judgement of their trial, they have been treated with the greatest sincerity, and matters weighed with the greatest possible respect, and that if an excuse could be found for them it has been deployed.<sup>96</sup>

Theirs was to be viewed, therefore, as a fair prosecution with a just outcome.

In order to ‘see justice done’, however, there was little to be gained for the crown by pursuing the princes of the blood and other aristocrats, but rather to go after the next rung of the nobility. In order to reduce the effectiveness of the Huguenot opposition, for instance, their commanders in the field were targeted. Both Montgomery and Montbrun had been a thorn in the side of the crown throughout the first three wars and even before. They had already been condemned for treason, so this ‘moment’ had been long in the making and was now exacerbated by real fears of a malcontent coup. In 1560, those involved in the conspiracy of Amboise had been executed by hanging, drowning or beheading and their corpses displayed on the battlements of the royal chateau as a warning to others.<sup>97</sup> The severity of the violence used against those implicated in the alleged plots of 1574/75 was similarly unrestrained. Conversely, Charles IX emphasized the closeness of his relationship with, and complete trust in, his brothers Alençon and Navarre, their ‘true and perfect friendship and good understanding’, a matter of weeks before evidence emerged of their involvement in a conspiracy, at the very least, to challenge his authority. Even thereafter, he

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<sup>96</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 462 (25 Apr.1574), 467 (2 May).

<sup>97</sup> Jouanna, *Devoir de révolte*, 140-1.

continued to maintain their innocence and to deny any malicious intent.<sup>98</sup> By contrast, he stated that La Molle and Coconat had recognized,

before undergoing their final torture, that they had been deservedly and justifiably condemned to death ... (and) they were found so guilty that they confessed themselves worthy of a much more cruel death than that which they had suffered.<sup>99</sup>

The evident discrepancy in treatment, however, was explicitly stated in their final interrogations, with Coconat declaring ruefully that ‘the *petits* are punished, and the *grands* whose fault it is remain’.<sup>100</sup>

When it came to over-mighty subjects among the highest ranking nobility, imprisonment and house arrest were the only options that the crown would pursue. Those who fled or were out of reach, such as the younger Montmorencies and Condé, could at best only be admonished to act in accordance with their status and honour, but repeated resistance risked confiscation, condemnation and disgrace. In the 1520s, the defection of Charles duc de Bourbon (great uncle of Navarre and Condé) to the Emperor Charles V had resulted in the confiscation of his title and lands, while the alliance of the duc de Montmorency (son of Damville) with Louis XIII’s brother in the 1630s had led to his execution. At both these points, the crown was more secure than was the case in 1570s, although they also demonstrate that the potential for plots and treason were never far away. In 1574, the crown was dealing with an uncertain situation and a new generation on both sides of the confessional divide whose impetuosity needed to be brought into line. Both Alençon and Condé were told that they needed to be more careful from whom they sought advice, also suggesting that their youth might excuse their being misled on this occasion, but would not protect them in future. The confessional dimension is also crucial to understanding the

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<sup>98</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 452 (7 Mar.); 457.

<sup>99</sup> *Correspondance diplomatique*, 467-8 (2 May).

<sup>100</sup> Goulart, *Mémoires*, iii, 263, 278; *Archives curieuses*, 197, 218.



differences with the period of the religious wars. The political and self-interested loyalties of younger brothers and high-ranking subjects were always a threat, but the existential framework of divided duties to God and king provided another less clear-cut perspective in which foreign powers also had a more vested interest than the purely political. This religious dimension also provided a powerful counter narrative to the crown's claims to be acting against traitors not martyrs, and it provided the ultimate justification for regicide.

Aristocratic discontent was also manifest in these plots, as a reaction to the perceived royal attack on the *grands* in France and beyond, marked by noble executions and the St Bartholomew's Day massacres. This was at least some of the basis of the justification for their actions put forward by Condé, Alençon, Navarre and Damville, among others.<sup>101</sup> Contemporaries were fully aware of the parallels with the recent actions of monarchs elsewhere in Europe in dealing with treacherous behaviour as a result of confessional division. Philip II of Spain took a hard-line in dealing with the leaders of the Dutch Revolt, with the counts of Egmont and Hoorne publicly executed in Brussels in 1568. Less well-known is the demise of Hoorne's younger brother, the baron de Montigny. Having led a delegation to Spain and been placed under house arrest, Montigny was eventually sentenced to death, but was instead garrotted in secret in October 1570.<sup>102</sup> Their deaths had a particular impact in France because Hoorne and Montigny were members of the extended Montmorency family. De Thou writes of the memory of their 'shameful death' and that they were 'unworthily executed'.<sup>103</sup> In England, too, Queen Elizabeth faced several revolts, including the Northern Rebellion of 1569 and the Ridolfi plot of 1570. Both the earl of Northumberland and the duke of Norfolk were beheaded for their part in these events in the

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<sup>101</sup> For discussion of these texts, Jouanna et al (eds), *Histoire et dictionnaire*, 232-3. Jouanna, *Devoir de révolte*, 148, 154-6, also links the three 'traumatic episodes' for the *grands* of 1568, 1572 and 1574.

<sup>102</sup> Parker, *Philip II*, 97-9.

<sup>103</sup> De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, vii, 216-17.

summer of 1572.<sup>104</sup> Taking place as they did before the executions of Montgomery and Montbrun, these examples may have been looked to as models by the French crown, especially after the debacle of St Bartholomew. In all these cases, the accusation of treason was paramount in justifying a conviction.

In line with earlier legislation to enforce the peace, the trials of 1574 were erased from the *Parlement's* registers by order of the king through the 1576 Edict of Beaulieu. This marked a return to coexistence with the Huguenots, now that their commanders had been conveniently dispatched, the situation calmed and agreement reached with Alençon and the other malcontents. A clear indication of the prominence of the duc's influence over the terms of the edict was that La Molle and Coconat were the first to be exonerated, followed by Coligny, then Montgomery, Montbrun, Briquemault and Cavaignes.<sup>105</sup> Importantly, for the reputation of their name and families, all had their sentences revoked and annulled and all record and memorials or accounts of their condemnation were ordered to be erased and their heirs no longer disinherited. Reflecting concern that previous actions had not been explicitly excused, the *vidame* de Chartres and his brother-in-law, Jean de Beauvoir La Nocle (brother of Jacques), were cleared for their part in negotiating a separate Huguenot peace with England in 1562, alongside grand royal declarations of the fraternal and cousinly affection held towards the 'dear and beloved' Alençon, Navarre, Condé and Damville.<sup>106</sup>

This general amnesty followed the crown's application of 'extraordinary' justice to rebels and traitors in contrast to the arbitrary violence of St Bartholomew. If the process was thus made more legitimate, avoiding the outrage prompted by assassination and murder, its erasure from the record might be thought to delegitimize it. Yet restitution was also a

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<sup>104</sup> For this reason, Elizabeth was accused of hypocrisy when she made an appeal to exonerate Montmorency, *Négociations diplomatiques*, iii, 929 (24 May 1574).

<sup>105</sup> *Édits des guerres de religion*, ed. A. Stegmann (Paris, 1979), 108-9, articles 33-35;

[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_07](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_07)

<sup>106</sup> *Édits des guerres*, 113, 115, articles 53 and 49.

necessary part of royal justice, demonstrating monarchical clemency. At any rate, in the heat of victory and compromise, no-one was interested in raising the issue, not least the newly titled duc d'Anjou. After 1576, he was happy to exploit his royal status to pursue his ambitions, and no doubt welcomed the initially more conciliatory and moderate atmosphere at his brother's court. The Huguenots as well no longer needed the duc's less than reliable support with the leadership of Condé and Navarre now firmly re-established and considerable, if short-lived, concessions won from the crown.

## VII

The executions of 1574-75 were not a bid for a state monopoly of violence, but a royal attempt to assert control, played out largely in response to events and the perceived threat from opponents of the regime. It reveals the weakness of the monarchy to act decisively against the most influential figures on both sides, restricted to extreme acts of assassination or hasty executions which achieved little.<sup>107</sup> Alliances with foreign rulers were significant in increasing the alarm of the authorities at a heightened threat to, and accusations of treason against, the French polity not just the crown. Yet, the execution of these commanders and the agents or favourites of the great acted as a warning shot but little else. The use of the judiciary in condemning the sword nobility is perhaps more telling, acting as royal agents of justice and demonstrating that such figures were not above the law (unlike their masters). The requirement to provide evidence of treason, largely through confessions extracted by torture, could be seen as both a weakness and a strength, an indication of the limits of royal authority to pursue those most at fault, but also the legitimacy of royal justice.

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<sup>107</sup> CSPF, 70/135, fo.127 (13 Sept.1575): on Admiral Coligny's son replacing Montbrun in Dauphiné, the actions of vicomte Turenne, and the seizure of Captain St André 'committed to prison with La Molle'.

These events cast a long shadow, shaping French politics for decades to come. They loomed over the reign of Henri III which was beset by continuing animosities, tensions and clashes between the crown and the nobility which were exacerbated rather than resolved by the king's decision to eliminate his chief rivals, the duc and cardinal de Guise, in December 1588, and his own murder eight months later. They also shaped his successor, and great survivor of the conflict, the first Bourbon king, Henri IV, for whom it had doubtless been a traumatic and formative episode. The threat of regicide was already present in the mid-1570s, as it had been in the supposed plots of 1560, 1567 and 1572. The repercussions of the assassination of Henri IV in 1610 show that, despite widespread fears, the authorities treated suspects with leniency, and no further executions resulted.<sup>108</sup> From this perspective, the mid-1570s should be viewed as a brief window of royal brutality generated by fear at a vulnerable moment. It was also one of several violent attempts by the crown and others to seize the initiative in the ongoing religious wars. Above all, the royal authorities sought to demonstrate that they could uphold order through the controlled and targeted use of extraordinary justice in the face of treason and disorder. That they failed to do so explains why these events do not have the resonance which they had for contemporaries, as traditional noble discontent continued to combine with confessional tensions in a volatile mix.

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<sup>108</sup> D. Roussel, ““Several fanatics who talked only of killing kings”: conspirators and regicides before the *parlement de Paris* in the wake of the assassination of Henri IV, 1610”, *French History*, 31 (2017), 459-76.